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SUBJECT: Nassau Monthly - November 2009

11. (U) This is a monthly report on a variety of topics of interest which do not merit full reporting cables.

-- Retirements, Cabinet Shakeup Leads to New Appointments

-- Airport Wait Times Cut as Secondary Screening Checkpoint Demolished

-- Tourism: Hotel Deals Hurt Revenues; Cruise Travel Up, Air Travel Still Down

-- GCOB Begins USD 850 Million Capital Works Program, Promises 2600 jobs

-- Intellectual Property Rights Enforcement Workshop A Success

-- Police Force Attacked for Soaring Murder Rate, Accused of Brutality and Indifference

-- Embassy Reading Program Inspires Love Of Books

-- New Coroner's Bill Would Mandate Inquests Into All Police-Custody Deaths

Retirements, Cabinet Shakeup Leads to New Appointments

12. (U) Minister of Education Carl Bethel was named the new Free National Movement (FNM) Chairman during last month's FNM convention. Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham and other challengers to the position, including incumbent Chairman Johnley Ferguson, nominated Bethel. Bethel said that he volunteered to take on the position "for the good of the party." The nomination of Bethel is rumored to be a counter against the election of Opposition Party PLP Chairman Bradley Roberts, who has made unceasing attacks against the Government since his election in October. Member of Parliament (MP) Desmond Bannister will assume responsibilities as Minister of Education. Bannister, previously the Minister of Youth, Sports, and Culture, will be replaced by first term MP and Minister of Culture, Charles Maynard. In addition, the Royal Bahamas Police Force Commissioner Reginald Ferguson will retire in January 2010. He will retire on the day that the new Police Act comes into effect, mandating retirement for all officers once they reach age 60, or complete 40 years of service, whichever comes first. A new commissioner has not been named. Finally, the Prime Minister announced November 22 that attorney John Delaney will be appointed the next Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs. Delaney's appointment has been criticized by the opposition because he does not have a background in criminal law. The Attorney

General's office is facing a formidable backlog of criminal cases, and clearing the log is seen as key to improving the administration of justice. Delaney has a background in commercial and financial litigation, and will also oversee regulations of the financial services sector.

Secondary Screening Checkpoint at Airport Demolished

13. (U) The secondary screening checkpoint at Nassau's International Airport was demolished less than 24 hours after airport officials received official notification from the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) that it had passed TSA inspections. Airport officials report that the elimination of the second checkpoint on November 27 has significantly improved passenger flow and has made "a tremendous difference" in the amount of time it takes a passenger to process through from check-in to gate arrival. Post worked closely with TSA and the GCOB Airport Authority officials to facilitate delivery of the letters to Minister of Tourism and Aviation Vanderpool-Wallace.

Tourism: Hotel Deals Hurt Revenues; Cruise Travel Up, Air Travel Still Down

14. (U) Preliminary statistics from the hotel industry and The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism and Aviation indicate that hotel occupancy in New Providence for October 2009 increased by 9.5 percentage points compared with 2008. However, an eighteen dollar decrease in the average daily room rate eliminated any gains in hotel room revenue. Overall room revenue fell 5.3 percent in October due to an increase in promotional deals among the major hotels. In September 2009, tourists arriving by air fell an additional 12.8 percent from September 2008, while sea arrivals increased 15 percent. These numbers support a consensus among industry experts in the country that value-oriented cruise tourism will continue to dominate the market until several months after a global economic recovery is perceived to have taken place.

GCOB Begins USD 850 Million Capital Works Program, Promises 2600 Jobs

15. (U) Minister of State for Finance Zhivargo Laing Announced that the GCOB will launch a USD 850 million capital works program over the next two years in order to stimulate the economy and address a growing unemployment rate thought to be at 17 percent. Laing said that at least 2600 jobs will come from the redevelopment of the International Airport, road improvement projects throughout the country, the construction of several new government complexes, power plants and the Arawak Cay container port as well as a New Providence Cleanup and Beautification project. Laing noted that to date, 13,000 people have received USD 18.5 million in unemployment

benefits.

Intellectual Property Rights Enforcement Workshop A Success

¶6. (U) Post partnered with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Royal Bahamas Police Force (RBPF) to host a two-day Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) enforcement workshop at the Police Training College on November 17-18. Twenty-five participants from the Royal Bahamas Police Force, the Bahamas Customs Office, the Department of the Public Prosecutor, and the Registrar General's Office shared ideas and developed strategies to enforce existing legislation protecting IPR in The Bahamas. DOJ trainers ran several practical exercises as well, include a search and seizure drill for pirated material. Participants developed a "brick and mortar" protocol to interdict businesses that produce pirated goods and heard from a Bahamian filmmaker who suffered financial losses from internet piracy of his work.

Police Force Attacked for Soaring Murder Rate, Accused of Brutality and Indifference

¶7. (U) The Bahamas stands poised to surpass their highest murder rate ever recorded; the current total of 78 matches the record from ¶2007. While other violent crimes are also at an all time high, the embattled Police Force has come under increasing attack over allegations of brutality and other improper behavior. A rape victim has alleged that investigators treated his case poorly because he is gay. He claimed that he had to wait hours to report his case or be seen by a medical examiner, and that the investigating authorities treated the case as a joke. In a separate case, a man charged with serial rape was ordered to the hospital by a Magistrate after he showed her welts on his torso, and alleged police brutality. He claimed that he had been beaten by detectives into signing a statement. Two Police Force officers were arrested in early November after an unauthorized bar-raids. They remain on active duty while the Force decides whether they will be disciplined. If they are disciplined, they may face a court-martial or a criminal trial. A ruling is also expected soon in the case of a Police Officer accused of having sex with two female minors.

Embassy Reading Program Inspires Love Of Books

¶8. (U) Ambassador Nicole Avant participated in a ceremony in honor of the Embassy and Ministry of Education's Read to Lead program on November 25. Woodcock Primary School honored the Ambassador with a special assembly in which the students discussed the importance of literacy and showcased their musical abilities. In her remarks, Avant reaffirmed her commitment to education and the literacy reading program and told the students that the Embassy was committed to inspiring and encouraging them through books. The Ambassador's visit received wide press coverage.

New Coroner's Bill Would Mandate Inquests Into All Police-Custody
Deaths

19. (U) The GCOB has proposed a new Coroner's Bill which would replace the 1909 Coroner's Act and grant new powers and responsibilities to the Coroner's Court. Among the changes, the Coroner's Court would be required to launch an inquest into any death that occurs while in custody. Deaths will be investigated if they occur while the person is in prison, when attempting to evade capture, or while attempting to escape custody. Investigations can also be pursued if the Coroner deems them to be in the "public interest." The Coroner's Court was set up in 1909 to deal with deaths involving police and other government personnel. It has been the subject of continual controversy as investigations are launched at the Coroner's discretion, fueling allegations about unfair treatment of police.

AVANT